Distt. Andhra Pradesh by a gang of thieves for which a FIR was already lodged on 30.9.1999 at PS Chajerala, Distt Nellore, Andhra Pradesh.

(e) All the field formations under the Customs Department including Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) are alert and vigilant to check smuggling of goods including smuggling of rare and historical idols out of the country. Measures have also been drawn up by the Archaeological Survey of India in consultation with the agencies such as the Driectorate of Revenue Intelligence, Central Bureau of Investigation, Customs and the State Governments to check the theft of antiques and their smuggling by stepping up of vigilance and intensifying checking at Customs exit points as well as by strict enforcement of the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972.

Interception of contraband at Chennai airport

2514. SHRI K. B. KRISHNA MURTHY: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether a large quantity of contraband was intercepted in diplomatic bags at Chennai airport recently;

(b) if so, whether these contraband originated from Singapore;

(c) whether the diplomatic mission on whose name the baggage was consigned had disowned the same; and

(d) what is the value of the contraband intercepted?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI GINGEE N. RAMACHANDRAN): (a) Yes, Sir. 109.021 kgs. of gold biscuits alongwith gold jewellery totally weighing 10.111 kgs, 1100 nos. of RAM chips and 150 nos. of Panasonic GD90 cell phones, recovered from 12 bags which arrived as 'diplomatic mail', were seized by the Customs Department on 11.7.2001.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) The value of the contraband intercepted is Rs. 5.70 crores.

MIS appropriation in import of Silver Ingots

2515. SHRI K. B. KRISHNA MURTHY: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether as reported in the Press there has been misappropriation of

bullion imported from the United Bank of Switzerland and held in the custody of the State Bank of India, Overseas Branch, Ahmedabad;

(b) whether it is also a fact that 39 tons of Silver Ingots (out of 50 tons) imported from Switzerland and held by the State Bank of India, Ahmedabad is missing beyond trace;

(c) whether any enquiry/investigation has been ordered into this affair; and

(d) if so, the outcome of the probe?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL): (a) State Bank of India (SBI) has reported that during inspection 1000 Ten Tola Bars of bullion were not produced for physical verification by their Overseas Branch, Ahmedabad. Subsequently, the exporter's agent in India delivered 1000 Ten Tola Bars into vaults of the bank and made up the shortage.

(b) SBI has also reported that the shortage of 39 tons of silver has been reported in the vault of the supplier's nominated agents and not in the bank's vaults.

(c) and (d) The concerned agent has lodged a complaint with the police for the missing silver.

Siphoning off funds from Peerless General Finance Investment Company

2516. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a few Directors of the Peerless General Finance Investment Company including its Managing Director have siphoned off huge funds from the parent company and opened new unviable companies in the name of their relatives and dependents; and

(b) if so, what steps are proposed to be taken to prevent such gross misuse of public depositors' money?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.